

Consolidated Reply: Comments to the UNDP Capacity Development Action Brief #1 – Case Evidence on ‘Brain Gain’

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Original Query

Dear Colleagues,

As one of the follow-ups to the 2006 Madrid Global Event on the Capacity Development Strategies, the UNDP Capacity Development Group has started a series of Capacity Development Action Briefs. The purpose of these Briefs is to enhance the quality and depth of the CD policy services and products through stocktaking and systemic appraisal of case evidences from the ground on key CD strategic support and application areas.

We would like to share with you the first [Capacity Development Action Brief](#) which presents case evidence on ‘brain gain’ as capacity development response under [Institutional Reform](#) and [Incentives](#). It focuses on the main characteristics of existing brain gain initiatives, the challenges faced, and some of the lessons learned from a select number of country practices. The common patterns and emerging trends in exploring the benefits of brain circulation and expatriate knowledge networks underpin the discussion. The paper concludes that political will at the highest level, coupled with a conducive policy/administrative environment and an integrated incentive package are the key factors that enable an effective brain gain initiative.

The document is a review of existing literature related to the topic. Therefore, we welcome comments and suggestions especially on country experiences that may have not been included in the document. Should you have any contributions, kindly send them before **30 April 2007 (extended to Friday, 04 May)**.

Many thanks and regards.

Jayne

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Contributions were received, with many thanks, from:

Click on the links to go straight to the contribution

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2. Nicholas Reith, UNDP BDP/CDG New York
3. Godfrey Jjooga Ssebukulu, Frontline Associates
4. George Yambesi, Public Service Mgt, Office of the President, United Republic of Tanzania
5. Japhet Makongo, Ubunifu Associates, Tanzania
6. Alexandra Windisch-Graetz, UNDP Bratislava
7. Mohammad Khasawneh, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan
8. Richard Manning, OECD/DAC
9. Robert G. Bernardo, Capacity 2015, UNDP Thailand
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11. Ken Afful, UNDP Sri Lanka
12. Dele Olowu, Africa-Netherlands Institute for Leadership, Peace & Development
13. Titus Osundina and Sanoussi Idrissa, UNDP Cape Verde
14. Taghrid Khuri, Portland State University
15. Lee Hock Guan, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore
16. Natasha Pillay on behalf of Minister Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi, Ministry of Public Service and Administration, Republic of South Africa
17. Nelly Potevin, UNV, UNDP Burkina Faso
18. Abdel El Abassi and Stella Anyangwe, WHO*
19. Pär Eriksson, Embassy of Sweden, Zambia*
20. J. Wakiaga, Embassy of Kenya, Washington, D.C.*
21. Temesghen Hailu, Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)*
22. Judith Puyat-Magnaye, UNDP/BDP/CDG, New York*

Summary Response

Many thanks to the members who responded to this query

Whether it is policy change in one country or practical actions in another, providing an incentive to turn brain drain into brain gain, there is considerable amount of concern and effort to address the numerous challenges faced by both the countries producing the skilled manpower and those utilising them. Of course, it is also acknowledged that there are benefits accrued by both sides of the paradoxical divide.

While a good number of studies have been undertaken to assess the situation, a more comprehensive analysis is required to understand the phenomenon and to develop effective program to address the challenges and harness the benefits. Indeed, the big question remains whether it is more valuable and useful for a highly skilled doctor or engineer to stay in his home country and practice his profession to the benefit of society, or for him to emigrate to the developed world and support his family and village economically through remittances (whether official or unofficial).

Country Experiences

Meanwhile, several countries have taken innovative steps to tackle the challenges of brain drain and benefit from the fruits of brain gain. Respondents to the discussion shared additional country experiences. Clearly, these experiences validate the conclusion drawn in the [‘Capacity Development Action Brief on Case Evidence on Brain Gain’](#) that political will at the highest level, conducive policy/administrative environment, and an integrated incentive package are the key factors that enable an effective brain gain initiative. In reality, political uncertainties, reverse cultural shocks, racial and class discrimination experienced by both returnees and those who stayed are some issues of concern raised by network members that merit careful consideration when addressing the issue of brain drain and brain gain.

Here is a summary of some of country experiences:

- **In Zambia**, a dialogue between the Ministry of Health and the Royal Dutch Embassy resulted in a tailor-made special incentive package that brought back Zambian doctors working in the neighbouring countries to take up jobs in the rural areas that were initially unattractive. To date, the total number of doctors on the Dutch retention scheme is 108. The scheme is in need of strong management. Therefore, more time is required to measure if the scheme has been successful in bringing back and retaining the doctors.
- **In Tanzania**, macro economic reforms undertaken in the past ten years have helped create a more conducive environment for investment in the country and have also reduced the cost of

doing business. Through economic diplomacy, nationals abroad have been sensitised to consider the possibility of making a contribution to the development of their home country. At the same time, ongoing reforms in the public service are addressing the problem of low pay. Though comparatively, the pay rise is still not competitive, already there is a big attraction for public service employment from within and those outside. Beyond attractive salary packages in both the public and private sectors, young professionals who have studied abroad would prefer working at home, where the jobs are more challenging and the prospects of climbing up the ladder are more promising than in other countries. Additionally, the on-going brain gain can be defined at both intra and inter-sectoral levels. The first entails employees shifting their focus of professionalism within the same organisation; and the second, employees move from one sector to another, but within the country.

- **In Jordan**, due to the limited natural resources, the country invested highly in its human resources and became one of the main suppliers of skilled labour force for other Arab countries. Two initiatives were launched to 'discourage' them from migrating to the western countries and making better use of them at home. A database of the professional Jordanians abroad has been established and an annual conference is held for them. The latter briefs them about investment opportunities in Jordan.
- **In Malaysia**, several incentives have been offered. They include tax reliefs on personal effects and vehicles brought by returning citizens, educational incentives for their children, and citizenship/permanent residency for non-Malaysian spouses/children of a Malaysian.
- **In Bhutan**, most of its trained manpower studied in Indian universities. This arrangement works well for Bhutan that doesn't have to invest in a tertiary education infrastructure. Most of these students come back to work in the civil service. This example has much merit as a model for other countries with minimal tertiary education infrastructure.
- **In Singapore**, whose public servants are among the highest paid, receiving equal or even higher salaries compared to the private sector in the country, an institutionalized system for identifying potential leaders and civil servants, who receive government scholarships/supports and are groomed to hold civil service positions, is in place. The country also has a scholarship programme called 'ASEAN' for students from Southeast Asia, South Asia and China. The age group starts from 10 years old to university age.
- **In Cape Verde**, there is a policy to encourage immigration of her indigenous experts and draw substantial resources from remittances. These are making up to 13.2% of GDP and 22% of the country's current account, compared with only 8% from foreign aid. One of the downsides to this policy is that the country is unable to develop its potential opportunities, e.g. tuna and lobster, making it 82% reliant on food imports.
- **In South Africa**, skilled foreign professionals have been attracted to the country since the end of apartheid in significant numbers. At the same time, many South Africans who have been living abroad are returning with a wealth of experience and skills. The challenge is to balance these two phenomena while training and improving the skills of nationals locally. South Africa has adopted a holistic and multifaceted strategy in addressing the brain gain issue. The approach adopted is composed of enabling legal frameworks; national initiatives; public sector focus which concentrates on the recruitment and retention of scarce skills in the public service to deliver public services efficiently and on an affordable basis to the people of South Africa; and public-private and donor initiatives such as the South African Network of Skills Abroad (SANSa). The general attitude is that brain gain can be initiated if the right positive message can be communicated about future prospects for the country.

- **In India and China**, through outsourcing of certain aspects of production, Research and Development (R&D), and a range of services, these two Asian economic giants have created professional incentives for their experienced nationals abroad to relocate back home.
- **In Mali**, the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) programme of UNDP supported by UNV gives a framework for elite to come back to their home country for 1-3 week assignments. This programme aims to solve the lack of high-qualified teachers in the national university, high schools and research institutes, and improving the quality of education.
- **In Morocco**, the government has taken many measures to encourage Moroccans who live abroad to keep the link with the country and to invest in the local private sector. The incentive package includes a facility to create innovative small and medium companies; investments in roads, clean water and electricity supply infrastructure, etc.
- **In Burkina Faso and Mali**, nationals of these countries living abroad have the right to vote and many do exercise this right. In doing so, they are also motivated to participate in their country's development.

In general comments, one idea was introduced that required further discussion. The thought of introducing brain drain tax levied on recipient countries. Then, proceeds would be used to support a global trust fund to support long-term assistance targeted at sustaining strategic skills that could turn economies of developing countries around over a specified time period.

Recommended Resources

Publications and Papers

1. [Institutional Reform and Change Management: Managing Change in Public Sector Organisations](#), Conference Paper, Capacity Development Strategies: Let the Evidence Speak, November 2006, Madrid, Spain
2. [Incentive Systems: Incentives, Motivation, and Development Performance](#), Conference Paper, Capacity Development Strategies: Let the Evidence Speak, November 2006, Madrid, Spain
3. The project brief of the [Brain Gain: Engaging Diaspora in Albania's Development](#)
4. The policy paper: "[From Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Mobilizing Albania's Skilled Diaspora](#)" prepared for the Government of Albania by the Centre for Social and Economic Studies, in collaboration with the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty, University of Sussex, UK
5. [Engaging the Diaspora Development – the Case of Albania](#)
6. [The programme to encourage Malaysian citizens with expertise residing overseas to return to Malaysia](#)
7. [The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, Expanded Edition](#). Thomas L. Friedman. April 2006. Official website of the book.
8. [Press Revue de presse-Ambassade de France au Cap-Vert](#). November 2005.
9. [Semantics Aside: The Role of the African Diaspora in Africa's Capacity Building Efforts: Case Study: Ethiopia](#). AHEAD. October 2004
10. Enabling Diaspora Engagement in Africa: Resources, Mechanisms and Gaps: Case Study: Ethiopia". AHEAD. For more information about the publication, visit AHEAD website at: <http://www.aheadonline.org/index.html>
11. Meyer, Jean-Baptiste and Wattiaux, Jean-Paul. [Diaspora Knowledge Networks: Vanishing Doubts and Increasing Evidence](#). IJMS: International Journal on Multicultural Societies. 2006, vol.8, no.1, pp. 4-24. UNESCO. ISSN 1817-4574. www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol8/issue1/art1

12. Mahroum, S., Eldridge E. and Daar A. [Transnational Diaspora Options: How Developing Countries Could Benefit from their Emigrant Populations](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol8/issue1/art2). IJMS: International Journal on Multicultural Societies. 2006, vol.8, no.1, pp. 25-42. UNESCO. ISSN 1817-4574. www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol8/issue1/art2
13. Arocena, Rodrigo and Sutz, Judith. [Brain Drain and Innovation Systems in the South](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol8/issue1/art3). IJMS: International Journal on Multicultural Societies. 2006, vol.8, no.1, pp. 43-60. UNESCO. ISSN 1817-4574. www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol8/issue1/art3
14. Berset, Alain and Crevoisier, Olivier. [Circulation of Competencies and Dynamics of Regional Production Systems](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol8/issue1/art4). IJMS: International Journal on Multicultural Societies. 2006, vol.8, no.1, pp. 61-83. UNESCO. ISSN 1817-4574. www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol8/issue1/art4
15. Consolidated Response from South Africa on the Case Evidence on Brain Gain. Ms. Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi, Minister for Public Service and Administration, South Africa. 04 May 2007

Useful Websites

16. Website to the ['Brain Drain: Engaging Diaspora in Albania's development' project](http://www.aheadonline.org/index.html), March 2006 – March 2007
17. Association for Higher Education and Development: <http://www.aheadonline.org/index.html>
18. Programme to Encourage Malaysian Citizens With Expertise Residing Overseas to Return to Malaysia: <http://www.mohr.gov.my/gpintro.php>
19. Singapore ASEAN Scholarships: <http://www.moe.gov.sg/aseanscholarships/>
20. [TOKTEN-MALI: Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals, Mali](http://www.moe.gov.sg/aseanscholarships/)